

**IDENTIFICATION OF BARRIERS IN THE POLITICAL
EMPOWERMENT OF HILL RURAL WOMEN: A STUDY
OF PAURI DISTRICT IN UTTARAKHAND**

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ABSTRACT

Women even though being reflecting a strong dimension in the current socio-economic scenario of the hill areas are still a million miles away from attaining the equal status as been prearranged to the other gender of the society. Several resurrecting policy actions have been taken by the government in the past but all lacked the perseverance to revive the condition of the women in these areas. Women reservation in the Panchayats is one of such policy action, although lot of studies reflects a negative portrait of the women's role as representative in Panchayats even to the extent that women representative are considered as mere dummy , functioning as proxy candidates under the close supervision of their guardians. The use of '*pati pradhans*' has become quite common in the context. Keeping in mind the importance of women in the hill regions it becomes highly important to assess the impact of increase of women participation in governance. In the same framework the following study being carried out in micro level in Pauri district of Uttarakhand state examines the problems a hill woman has to face in the governance emanating not only from her family but also from the society. The study further scrutinizes the role of women in the decision making process while further assessing the contribution they have made to the development process along with the efforts towards empowerment of women in the region.

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Introduction

Hill rural areas of Uttarakhand present the most tough living and working conditions for the residents of these areas. The unavailability of employment opportunities and poor infrastructural development has accentuated the problem of these backward and far flung areas. Further the poor natural settings and tough geographical conditions have always enacted as a hurdle in the development of these areas. These residents have to spend their lives working in most harsh environment accentuated by the poor infrastructure and the lack luster approach of the Government towards these areas. About 87 percent of population of Pauri Garhwal district in Garhwal region is residing in rural areas. This is a very significant percentage and shows the rural areas dominance in the district. Agriculture is the basic occupation in the rural areas of the district while service and entrepreneurship is the main mode of earning for the population residing in the urban areas. Majority of villages have still the kuccha road, they have water problems, irrigation system is poor and proves hard for the residents, villagers have to depend on the far areas for the health facilities while the prevalence of differentiation on the basis of caste, creed and gender is still dominant further social malice's like dowry system, violence on women, alcoholism are prevalent. Poverty and unemployment are the other problems which aggravates the tribulations of the women in these areas. Women are the major sufferers of this malevolence prevalent in the rural areas of the district. Even though being living a life of negligence the women of these areas are major bread earners for their families. These women not only conduct their household activities to the best but also engage themselves in the outdoor economic activities. Agriculture activities is mainly carried by women of these areas, they even have to go to far areas for fetching water for their domestic use and even have to carry the domestic animals for grazing. Due to the money order nature of the economy the role of the women in these areas became more significant after the inclination and migration of the males towards the urban areas. Majority of males in these rural areas are working in the urban areas. The males of these areas are rarely engaged in the agricultural or other rural activities which push the women to take up the work burden in these areas. All these circumstances have led to the poor and suppressed nature of the women in the rural areas. Keeping in purview the dominant role of women in the rural economy and further noticing the degrading standard of women the government have taken a decision of engaging rural women in the local governance process. The aim of this step was to empower women through giving them a dominant role in the society.

Review of literature

After 1993, women's participation in local governments increased quite radically, with the enactment of the legislation providing 33 percent reservation of seats for women in local bodies. The legislation and its implementation have added another level in political participation. Some studies of Parliamentary participation indicate that women members participate more actively in 'women's issues' – health, welfare, atrocities against women, crimes like dowry and violations of human rights. This participation is confined to the more articulate women. In issues such as defense, finance, politics, etc. their participation is relatively limited. (www.unescap.org/huset/women/reports/india).

Women's role in providing for drinking water, collecting and utilizing it for other domestic purposes has been fairly well-documented. Although women play a major role in the collection and use of domestic water, they have a small role to play in key decisions on community drinking water schemes. This is despite the fact that States have implemented the quota system in village water and sanitation committees under the Panchayati Raj system. Despite these quotas and the allocation of a small but dedicated fund, women remain marginal in the decision-making process. A range of factors, from economic status to caste and importantly patriarchy, play a role in determining women's participation in the public sphere. (www.indiawaterportal.org).

While the Constitution of India, in Articles 325 and 326, guarantees political equality to all men and women, women clearly have not benefited from this right. In this context, it is critical to enhance the capacity of women to fight elections; reduce or remove the preventive barriers; and to introduce new affirmative steps - such as quotas, that can enhance the participation of women in the state and national parliaments. (<http://www.csrindia.org>)

In thirteen years since the law's implementation, positive change can be seen in many villages, with active, capable women representatives serving the needs of their communities. However, unfortunately a proactive, capable woman representative is not necessarily the norm. In many situations, women elected to village councils are either not performing well or not performing at all. For reasons of cultural norms, historical bias, and unfamiliarity with local politics, there are a number of factors which hold women back from successfully serving in village councils after they have been elected. These reasons range from issues of self esteem to family burden to lack of education. (<http://web.worldbank.org>)

Women representatives face problems at every stage of their participation—from the Gram Sabha to Zila Parishad. ‘In an Open Forum organised by the Rural Litigation And Entitlement Kendra for 300 elected women representatives of PRIs of Uttar Pradesh, the following observations were made by the participants: Women were branded as ‘incompetent’ in the eyes of villagers and were forced to quit through the passing of no-confidence motions, Undue interference by the husband (post sarpanches) of women representatives, treating them as mere dummies, Widespread use of corrupt practices among the male members and local bureaucrats. (Rajesh Gill (2006), “Empowering Women Through Panchayats”, in *Man and Development*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4, Chandigarh: CRRID)

The family, community and the state (represented by the officials) have together created a situation wherein elected women representatives are facing many operational constraints while playing their roles and discharging their functions in the PRIs. ‘Women representatives have some individual weaknesses: Illiteracy and low education levels of the majority of the women elected to the PRIs, Overburdened with family responsibilities, Introversion due to the lack of communication skills, Poor socio-economic background with which the women have come into the system and poor capacity building, Patriarchal system indirectly controls and directs their participation.’ (R. Venkata Ravi and P. Sunder Raj (2006), “Decentralisation and Development in India”, in *Man and Development*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4, Chandigarh: CRRID)

The literature on the status of women engaged in governance clearly reflects that they have to come across number of gender initiated problems which leads into their inactive participation. The literatures recognizing the importance of women in the governance discusses some of these problems as working of males as proxies for females, illiteracy among women, and lack of communication which acts as major hurdles in their governance process.

Study Area and Methodology

To assess the rural women role in Panchayats in Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, rural areas of Pauri Garhwal district were selected for the study. As of 2001 Indian census, the Pauri Garhwal district has a population of 6,96,851. The district has a high sex ratio of 1104. Total literacy rate of district is 77.9 percent of which females have a literacy rate of 65.6 percent. 87 percent of the district population is residing in the rural areas. The main occupation of the population is

agriculture. According to the provisional census 2011 records, Pauri Garhwal, had a population of 686,527. According to the 2011 census there was a change of -1.51 percent in the population, compared to population as per 2001. Average literacy rate of Pauri Garhwal in 2011 was 82.59 compared to 77.49 of 2001. If things are looked out at gender wise, male and female literacy were 93.18 and 73.26 respectively. For 2001 census, same figures stood at 90.91 and 65.70 in Pauri Garhwal District.

Besides, army / para-military forces and teaching are a major source of employment for young people. Due to the lack of required infrastructure and the geography of the area, there are no major industries in the district. However, some industrial units have been established around Kotdwara.

24 villages of Pauri Garhwal district comprising of 24 women representatives in Panchayats were selected on the basis of stratified random sampling method for the study. Further a sample of 55 local women and 60 local men who were not the part of local governance system were interviewed for the study. To deduct the information related to the study questionnaire in the form of schedules were utilized. Observation method and indirect oral investigation methods were also used to collect the suitable information.

Objectives of the study

The Panchayati Raj system, introduced through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, is the most definitive step towards re-energising democracy in the history of independent India. The inclusion of compulsory women representation in it increased its democratic dimension and acted as a positive aspect for the women empowerment. However, unfortunately a proactive, capable woman representative is not necessarily the norm. In many situations, women elected to village councils are either not performing well or not performing at all. For various reasons like cultural norms, historical bias, and unfamiliarity with local politics, there are a number of factors which hold women back from successfully serving in village councils after they have been elected. But increasing the representation of women has not automatically led to a more gendered analysis of the issues confronting local government. Nor has it necessarily raised the profile of women's needs and interests in the policy agenda, given that elected women often act as proxies for men's views at the councils, being advised by their male relatives.

Keeping in mind the importance of women in rural areas of Uttarakhand the study aims to assess the role of rural women in governance. The study examines the importance and contribution of women in the local governance. In this process the study conduct an impact assessment study of women's participation in governance. The study also attempts to analyze the validity of the term 'Pati Pradhan' which is more often attached with the women politician. In the process the study conduct a study of local community perception towards women's significance in the governance. The study aims to deduct the problems faced by women in the local governance system and the factors influencing the women's participation rate in governance activities. The study further examines the various factors affecting the performance of the women in the governance process. The study attempts to deduct the various policy actions which could lead to more effective representation and performance of women in the local governance system.

Research Findings

Profile of Women engaged in Governance

For carrying out the study a sample of 24 females engaged in local governance from 24 villages were selected on the basis of judgement sampling method. The study shows that majority of these females belong to the age group between 25 to 35 years. 67 percent of females fall under this age group, while 22 percent of females belong to the age group of above 35 years. This shows that the females basically come from the child bearing group which could lead to their poorer participation in governance activities. The study further shows that 86 percent of females are married which is a major factor in determining the work hours of the female members. 65 percent of the females belong to the joint families while 85 percent of the females belong to the male headed households. 86 percent of the females belong to the families that are depended on the agricultural activities.

Table: 1 Motivation factor for joining the local governance system

Motivation factors	Percentage of women
Self decision	23
Suggested by family	42
Suggested by the rural community	6
Connection with political groups	-
Connection with women groups	17
Others	12

Source: Field Survey (2009)

The above table clearly shows that women are largely brought in the governance by the suggestions of the family members. This suggests that majority of women are mainly pushed by the family members which are basically male members who are either related to politics or are interested to be a part of the local governance in direct or in indirect manner.

Table: 2 Male family members earlier/presently engaged in politics

Category of male family members	Percentage of female representatives
Engaged in politics	41
Not engaged in politics	30
Engaged in social activities	17
Engaged in social local groups	12

Source: Field Survey (2009)

The above table depicts that majority of the female representatives have male family members who are either connected with the political system or have been actively participating in the social activities in the rural areas. Only 30 percent of females representatives are from the families who

do not have any male members which are engaged with politics or with the social programmes. This clearly indicates towards the possibilities of male member interference in the working of their family female representative in the governance.

Women's participation rate in Governance activities

To study the women's participation rate in the local governance activities we have examined the work hours they contribute to the various activities in their rural background. These activities includes household work which include activities like children look after, water fetching for household use, cooking and other family works. The family income generation activities are mainly the farm activities carried by these women. The study of work hour contribution will help us in determining the work load on the women and the time they are sharing for the various activities in the rural areas which will help us in deducting the time these women are able to contribute to the governance activities. The table given below shows the work hour's distribution of women engaged in local governance system.

Table: 3 Work hours distribution of women involved in local governance

Family work activities	Women involved in such activities (in %age)	Time contributed and percentage of women in such activities (in hrs)
Indoor Household activities	100	1 to 2 hrs- 0
		2 to 4 hrs-0
		4 to 6 hrs- 70%
		6 to 8 hrs- 15%
		More than 8 hrs- 15%
Outdoor household	85	1 to 2 hrs- 80%
		2 to 4 hrs- 20%

activities		4 to 6 hrs- 0% 6 to 8 hrs- 0% More than 8 hrs- 0%
Family income generation activities		
Agriculture and other allied activities	75	1 to 2 hrs- 10% 2 to 4 hrs- 0% 4 to 6 hrs- 10% 6 to 8 hrs- 65% More than 8 hrs- 15%
Others	10	1 to 2 hrs- 0% 2 to 4 hrs- 30% 4 to 6 hrs- 70% 6 to 8 hrs- 0% More than 8 hrs- 0%
Services	0	

Source: Field Survey (2009)

The study of rural women work hours who are involved in local governance activities reveals the following aspects;

- Majority of all the women are actively involved in the governance carries household and family income generating activities
- Maximum percentage of women involved in indoor household activities contributes around 6 to 8 hours.
- Majority of women contributes around 1 to 2 hours for outdoor household activities.

- Around 95 percent of women are engaged in income generating activities while agriculture is the major among such activities.
- 65 percent of women engaged in local governance are involved in agricultural activities and are contributing 6 to 8 hours in it.

The study clearly suggests that females even though being engaged in local governance in these rural areas are overburdened by the domestic household and income generating activities. The absence of water resources and there being located at far areas mainly leads to extra outdoor household activities by women which increases their work pressures. The study further shows that females are largely engaged in agricultural activities in which they have to contribute the large working hours. This clearly suggests that the women have very little time left for the governance and rural development activities. And further if they extract any time for it, the other work pressure prevents them in dedicating the efforts expected from them. The table given below shows the overall work hours these women have to contribute for the work activities other than the governance and development activities.

Table: 4 Overall work hours distribution of women engaged in local governance

Work hours given to the household and income generating activities	Percentage of women involved in household and income generating activities	
	In Male-headed household (MHH) in %age	In Female-headed household (FHH) in %age
0 to 1 hrs	-	-
1 to 2 hrs	-	-
2 to 4 hrs	10	-

4 to 6 hrs	10	-
6 to 8 hrs	-	-
10 to 12 hrs	30	30
More than 12 hrs	50	70

Source: Field Survey (2009)

The above table shows that majority of women either from female headed household or male headed households have to dedicate more than twelve hours in household and income generating activities. This reflects the amount of time that is left with these women to undertake the local governance and development activities in these hill rural areas. This often leads to either divergence of female efforts and negligence towards development activities or to family male member (mainly husbands) involvement in the governance activities acting as proxies for the female members.

Community perception towards women's significance in governance

To increase the community development in a more effectual manner women's participation was brought in the system. The participation of women in decision-making constitutes an important step towards democracy; further women's participation ensures diversity in contributions to policy-making and can offer new perspectives and priorities. But a lot of negative facets have been brought in surface towards the women involvement in the politics. It has been emphasized by the government that these women should not only formally govern the local system but they should come ahead as major decision makers. But the decision making process could be possible only when there is effective leadership going from the side of women. Any effective leadership requires community support and positive attitude towards the leader, which becomes more important in the small communities as existing in these rural areas. The research here focuses on studying the community perception towards women leadership and governance to deduct the space allocated to women by the community and future possibilities of better performance of women in the governance process. To study the perception of the local rural community for the

women's significance and importance in local governance system a sample of 60 males and 55 females were studied from the respective villages of the district.

Table: 5 Community perceptions towards women's significance in governance

Factors on which perception is inquired	No. of Males (in %age)		No. of Females (in %age)		Total respondents (in %age)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Women role is important in family	62	38	85	15	74	26
Women role is important in society	68	32	58	42	63	37
Women role is important in local governance	27	73	30	70	29	71
Women have potential for leading rural development activities	22	78	41	59	32	68
Men are better leaders than women in governance	17	83	58	42	75	25

activities						
Male members acts as proxies for Females members	35	65	42	68	39	61

Source: Field Survey (2009)

The above table depicting the perception of rural community reveals the following aspects:

- Majority of females and males from the local community, in which there is relatively a higher percentage of females in comparison to males who consider that women role, is important in the family.
- Larger percentage of males and females consider that role of women is important for the society.
- Higher percentage of both gender consider that role of women in the local governance system is not important.
- Majority of males and females perceives that women do not have the potential for leading rural development activities while male's percentage among this category is relatively higher than the females.
- Majority of males consider that males are better leaders than women in governance while majority of females consider that females are better leaders than males.
- Higher percentage of both gender perceive that in rural areas males work as proxies for female leaders.

The study depicts that even though majority of local community perceives that women have an importance role and significance in the family and the society but still the community is not largely assertive for the women's role in the governance process. This depicts the lack of confidence among the rural community for the females for carrying governance process in the

rural areas. This reflection of lack of confidence for the female governance is further established by the fact that majority of respondents of both genders have considered that women do not have the potential for leading rural development activities. The concerning picture that comes up from the picture is that a good percentage of females perceives that males are better leaders than the females while the majority of males have accepted this aspect. This depicts the lack of gender sensitization among females and that females are not in the arrangement to promote and support the women governance. The working of male family members as proxies for female members in governance activities is widely accepted by the community.

Factors influencing the women's participation rate in Governance and development activities

Women in these hill rural areas are carrying the burden of not only keeping up their families but also helping in the survival of the economy in the harshest environment. These women are in worst socio-economic position and are not even being helped by the government steps like quota in local governance. The participation rate of the women engaged in the local governance system is poor and not satisfactory to help them in playing an important role in the system. The study here attempts to categorize the essential factor which reduces the women participation rate in the governance and development process in the rural areas.

(a) Illiteracy

In Pauri district female literacy level is very low in comparison to male literacy. 2001 census shows that 90 percent of males are literate while only 66 percent of females are literate in the state. This illiteracy has been the major reason for the poor socio-economic conditions of the women in the rural areas. Because of illiteracy, these women are excluded from community development, are uninformed of their rights, and have trouble getting jobs, going to the bank or helping their children with their studies. In a society where women struggle to be recognized, illiteracy preserves the oppression. The table given below shows the literacy status of females engaged in governance in the Pauri Garhwal district.

Table No: 6 Percentage of literacy among females engaged in governance

Education status	Percentage of females	Percentage of dominant male members in the family
Illiterates	7 (29%)	7 (22%)
Literates	17 (71%)	25 (78%)
(a) Read and write	10 (59%)	6 (24%)
(b) High School	4 (23%)	3 (12%)
(c) Intermediate	2 (12%)	8 (32%)
(d) Graduation	1 (6%)	5 (20%)
(e) Post Graduation	-	3 (12%)
Total Females	24	32

Source: Field Survey (2009)

The data shown in the above table shows that although majority of women representatives in local governance are literates but the closure examination of the above data reveals that 67 percent of these literates are only capable of reading and writing. This clearly projects the strength of women representatives on the basis of education. The poor education result in the inadequate confidence level of women and further continues to be a formidable stumbling block for women to realize their full leadership potential. The study further shows that the majority of male members of the women engaged in governance are literates. This reflects the indifference shown to the females in the rural society along with indicating the interference of these male family members in the governance related working of women representatives.

(b) Patriarchy and corruption

Women are oppressed on a personal and individual basis by the individual patriarchs who share their lives. The segregationist strategy used in the public patriarchy actively excludes women

from the public arena using various structures to subordinate them. The study here discusses the extent and effect of patriarchy system in these rural areas. Patriarchal values, political intimidation from opposition parties or men from the same party, vested groups, and the political and administrative system itself were the major obstacles obstructing the functioning of the elected members. Hostility, ridicule and insensitivity from government functionaries were other factors. The study has shown that around 39 percent of the respondents from the local rural community have accepted that males work as the proxies for the women representatives in the local governance. This clearly reveals the dominance of male members even after the women participation in governance, thus these women work only as rubber stamps in these rural areas. Additionally, many women do not choose independently to run for election. Some are coerced into running by husbands or family members, and there may simply be a lack of interest or will on the part of the participant. It was revealed from the study that when these women have to meet officials or elected representatives in the town, women representatives are forced to take their family members (mainly male members) along, which makes them appear dependent on others to get their work done. The dominance of patriarchy is further revealed from the comparison of literacy level of males and females from the same families in the rural areas. The study shows that males are not only highly educated than the females but the illiteracy level is low among the males relatively to females. The study shows that 58 percent of females engaged in the local governance are from the families in which there are the male members who have been earlier in the politics.

Table: 7 Problems related to males in the governance process

Problems encountered by the females in governance system	Percentage of females
Mis-guidance and by male officials	46%
Mis-treatment my males	36%
Men's reluctance to share	42%

public space with women	
Lack of Cooperation from male Colleagues	46%
Priority given to males	40%

Source: Field Survey (2009)

The above table clearly shows that female's representatives in local governance have to face lot of problems in governance process not only from their colleagues but also from the male officials. The study shows that to how much extent the patriarchy negatively effects the equal participation of females in the governance process. 46 percent of the female representatives have revealed that they are misguided by the male officials which results in their lack of effective performance in the development activities. Majority of females have suggested that they are not given importance and are neglected in the officials meetings and even being mistreated and ignored by the male colleagues. Their suggestions are not given due importance in any meetings while their lack of knowledge and experience becomes a more aggravating factor for the male dominance over them. Even the lack of confidence among the females is harshly exploited by the male members against them.

Corruption in the offices is the other factor which inhibits the working of the females in the local governance system. The huge presence of commission system in the official working process hinders the working of the women's. In the study 37 percent of the women have accepted that commission system is negatively affecting their working process.

(c) Other factors

Lack of feminist consciousness

The study has shown that feminist consciousness is largely lacking not only among the women that are engaged in the governance but also among the women from the local rural community.

The study shows that majority of women perceive that women have no major role to play in the local governance system and in any development activities. A large percentage of women have accepted that men are better leaders than women. The effective representation of the women in governance can only be brought with the help and support of local community women recognizing their importance and developing a respect for the women at such leadership positions ignoring the set traditional belief that men are better leaders than the women.

Poverty

Poverty is the other constraining factor that results in poor and inactive participation of the women in the local governance. The study shows that 19 percent of the women representatives have indicated that the family poverty restricts their active participation in the governance. While 28 percent of the women from the local rural community perceive that poverty is the major obstacle in the women representation to local governance in the rural areas. These women even do not have the financial resources to lead their election campaign.

Poor family support

The study further shows that majority of women are contributing almost half a day for the household and income generating activities which leaves them with very less time for governance related activities. The male dominant rural society forcefully compels women to contribute their large work hours for the family.

Lack of confidence

The study deducts that introversion is commonly noticed among the rural women which mainly surfaces from the lack of communication skills. The lack of confidence of women is mainly reflected in public speaking which they largely avoid. Even in the local meetings they hesitate to share their ideas and even are reluctant to ask for their queries.

Other factors

Lack of transport facilities/assistance- In the study 46 percent of the women have revealed that lack of adequate transport facilities and assistance leads to their misery. These women in absence of transport facilities often fail to regularly visit the district offices for various purposes.

Misguidance by officials - even a large percentage of women have indicated that they have been misguided by the officials and that too mainly by the males. These officials instead of serving them with adequate information misguide them to an extent that their work gets largely affected.

Lack of economic independence- The rural women in these under developed areas are largely depended on their families or on the agriculture. There is no scope for employment or entrepreneurship for the women. Agriculture is down trodden and is pursued, for only feeding the respective families. Males mainly youths prefer to migrate from the rural areas to urban areas leaving only women to carry the agriculture in these areas. Thus women are mainly non-independent and lack the courage to take a step ahead from the circle drawn around her by the family compulsion.

Poor water availability- In majority of villages of this district there is a huge dearth of water resources. The water resources are located at very far flung areas and fetching water for the household activities is the work largely ascertained for the women's of the family. This leads to large extra work load for the women of these areas which directly increase their work pressures resulting in, inactive participation in governance and other development activities.

Positive aspect of women's participation in local governance

Women at the Panchayat level have also taken an active part in social programmes such as mass literacy drives, pulse polio administration and midday meal schemes, and they even visit buildings for electricity meter reading. Issues in which women representatives generally take interest are drinking water supply, primary health, child care, public distribution system and environmental protection. One quality observed among women representatives is their patience to hear the problems of the public. They also work in adverse circumstances. It has been observed that women representatives are honest and accurate in presenting issues to the decision-making bodies and authorities. Women would bring new ideas in local governance. They believe in a sustainable development and their emphasis is on natural resources management. Women

representatives working at the grass root level also believe that communal harmony is an important element of development and they strive to achieve this objective. Another promising fact is that they do not indulge in corrupt practices. (S.S. Sree Kumar (2006), "Representation of Women in Legislature: A Sociological Perspective in the Indian Context", in *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. LXVII, No. 3, Meerut: Indian Political Science Association)

Women are considered an extremely pivotal point in the process of change in the rural areas. Women's participation in panchayats provided opportunities to women to participate in the decision-making process. Women's participation proved to be the most effective instrument in bringing about a change in their way of life in terms of economic well-being and adoption of new technology. (A.Rajeshwari, *PRI's and Women*, in G. Palanithurai (ed.) (1996), *Empowering People—Issues and Solutions*, New Delhi: Kanishka)

Women leaders in the Panchayati Raj are transforming local governance by sensitizing the State to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice. Through the PRI, they are tackling issues that had previously gone virtually unacknowledged, including water, alcohol abuse, education, health and domestic violence which suggest that Women value nearness. The enormous expansion of women's representation in decentralised government structures has highlighted the advantages of proximity, namely the redress of grievance and the ability to mobilise struggle at a local level where it is most meaningful. Thus women are helping to radicalize local government. The large women participation in governance has led to increase in the women's awareness about their basic rights. The women participation has further the potential of reducing the commission tendency in the Indian official working system.

Policy prescriptions and suggestions

The study suggest that women though being given the privilege of participation in the local governance but still are far away from using that stage to empower themselves along with bringing effective development in their constituencies. Accepting the role of women in the development process the study here attempts to provide the policy prescriptions for brining the effective participation of women in the governance process. The study here gives suggestions on the different levels.

On the level of women

It is women who can inspire confidence and offer stimulus for social change especially among other women in the rural areas. Hence, effective leadership among women must come from the women themselves. These women should accept the importance of women in the leadership positions and promote the women in such activities. Community awareness programmes should be undertaken by the local social groups for this purpose. The women from the local community should come ahead to support their working. Women leaders should conduct regular meetings with the local women to discuss their problems and to evolve suggestions and new ideas from them. The women leaders should take the help of Mahila Mangal Dals (rural women councils) for conducting such meetings while recognizing their importance.

On the Government level

The study shows that there is lack of effective participation of women in the governance which is because of the lack of proper information and experience about the working system hence their active participation can be achieved through training besides of course the literacy educational programmes. Government should recognize the importance of giving training to the newly appointed women in the governance. Mahila Mandals could be activated for this purpose where women could learn skills. The government (Ministry of Women and Child Development) should take the responsibility to make the rural women aware about their rights and responsibilities. Government should further ensure that the women are not marginalized in the revenue and expenditure committee structures. For that Links have to be strengthened between the village and the bureaucracy at the lower level.

Further the lack of confidence arising out of poor communication skills and fear of public speaking should be dealt in the training sessions. Training is one of the most important venues for a newly elected women representative to become comfortable with their new position. Trainings give women a chance to ask questions, acquire new information, make networking connections, and learn how to speak in public and assert themselves. Leadership training should be given to these women for strengthening the identity and feminist consciousness of women representatives.

Capacity building training should be given to the women to make them believe their worth and to be independent. Women MLAs and MPS from the constituencies should visit the villages and interact with these women at all forums. This is will not only serve as a confidence building

foreground for the rural women but will also serve as a medium to push their demands to the higher level for effective and quick action. These higher positions women should encourage these rural women to take decisions independently and in the manner that is suitable for them. Further campaigns and training programmes to prepare the women both as electors and elected should be carried out with the help of NGO's and other local social activist groups. The government should further facilitate their meetings across districts, offering women representatives forum to discuss issues and ideas among themselves.

On the level of other actors (NGO's, Bureaucrats, etc)

Finally, as society is made up of many entities, the role of other such valuable actors like non-government, bureaucrats, and social activist groups should not be ignored. Gender sensitization is not only needed for men in the villages, but also for the bureaucrats who interact with women representatives. Bureaucrats while interacting with females should not treat women indifferently and help them by giving them adequate and timely information. Role of Non government organization should be to not only aware and train the rural women but also to build confidence and leadership abilities in them through various capacity building programmes.

Women leaders in the Panchayati Raj are transforming local governance by sensitizing the State to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice. Through the PRI, they are tackling issues that had previously gone virtually unacknowledged, including water, alcohol abuse, education, health and domestic violence. The need of the hour is to encourage and strengthen these women more towards leadership which would go a long way to not only empower these women but also will help in delimiting the corruption along with development of the rural areas in an effective way.

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